

Profile of President Heather Mack 2018 – 2020

At the July 2018 Council meeting, Dr Heather Mack was elected as the first ever female President of RANZCO and took on the role at the 50th Annual Congress in Adelaide in November that year. For over 15 years Heather had provided dedicated service to the College in a range of roles, including the Victoria Branch Committee. Not only did Dr Mack make College history by being the first woman elected to the position of President, she was also the first female Treasurer on the RANZCO Board and the first female head of the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Committee. As well as an in-depth knowledge of the workings of the College, Heather brought to the role strong business and management experience.

Born in Geelong on 12 May 1960, Heather spent her early childhood in Geelong and Eltham, and attended Eltham High School. In 1973 she was awarded a Junior Scholarship by the Education Department Victoria, with a further award of Mathematics Special Distinction (top 0.5% state-wide) in 1977 when she gained the Higher School Certificate.

At University of Melbourne Heather was awarded Prizes and Scholarships before she was awarded a Bachelor of Medical Science in 1983 and a Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MB BS) with Second Class Honours in 1984, when she was awarded the Royal Australian College of Ophthalmologists (RACO) Prize (Victorian branch). Heather entered training as an Ophthalmology Registrar at the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital (RVEEH) in 1988 and in 1991 she received a National Health and Medical Research Council Medical Postgraduate Research Scholarship along with a Howard Florey Scholarship for Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) studies. Her fourth year of vocational training was spent as the first year of the PhD in Developmental Biology of the Eye having been given special approval by the Censor-in-Chief. This was awarded in 1996. She then undertook a clinical Fellowship at the Berman-Gund Laboratory at Harvard Medical School, Massachusetts Eye & Ear Infirmary in Boston USA. Meanwhile In 1992 Heather became a Fellow of the Royal Australian College of Ophthalmologists (FRACO, as it was at the time) and a Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (FRACS). In 1996 Heather also briefly became a Member Royal Australian College of Medical Administrators and in 2002 was awarded a Master of Business Administration at the Melbourne Business School. In 2005 she was awarded the Order of Merit by the Australian Institute of Company Directors for performance in the Diploma examination, and subsequently became a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Heather co-authored multiple publications on various aspects of clinical ophthalmology research and medical education, and presented papers at many forums. She is a member of the Reviewer Panel for Clinical and Experimental Ophthalmology. She was a member of the Retina Australia Grants Committee (1998-2010), and in 1994 participated in directing postgraduate careers in medicine as a member of the Victorian Medical Postgraduate Foundation.

As Director of CPD from 2005 to 2011, Dr Mack reformatted the CPD framework to emphasize learning plans, key competencies of Ophthalmologists, and passive vs. active activities. When the CPD program was assessed in the RANZCO reaccreditation by the Australian Medical Council in 2006 it was awarded a commendation, a major accomplishment for the Committee and RANZCO. When the Australian Health Practitioner Regulator Authority (AHPRA) introduced mandatory CPD in July 2010, the CPD committee were ready with a pre-existing program that already met the new requirements.

Having become a RANZCO Board member in 2011 Dr Mack was aware that governance skills are very different from ophthalmology clinical skills, and valued the role of Honorary Treasurer as a very useful background for the role of President. Heather appreciated that the Treasurer needed to be across the College's financial affairs, financial regulators, and risk profile because the Treasurer's role interacts with the College's auditors, investment managers and external financial advisory

committee, while the Finance, Audit and Risk Management Committee, which she chaired, regularly reviewed the risk and complaints registers.

When in 2019 RANZCO celebrated the Golden Jubilee of 50 years since the establishment of the College, Clinical A/Prof Mack reflected on the changing role of the President which, although had become more complex, a lot remained unchanged. Heather's focus on becoming President was for the RANZCO to maintain leadership in collaborative eye care and to recognise and work with the many external regulators and stakeholders in eye health care. The launch of the Reconciliation Action Plan at this Congress in Sydney was another momentous moment in college history, with an inspiring address by Ms Nova Peris OAM, Australia's first Aboriginal Olympic Gold Medallist and former Northern Territory Senator.

In 2020 the Covid-19 Pandemic hit the world, affecting healthcare workers disproportionately, with ophthalmologists at high risk due to their closeness with patient's faces. Through the opportunity provided by Covid-19, Heather encouraged her colleagues to consider the range of CanMED skills and to actively learn more, such as undertaking communication or Good Clinical Practice training.

Since stepping down from the presidency A/Prof Mack has re-focussed her clinical work on people with inherited retinal diseases, and has taken Directorships of Retina Australia and Vision2020 Australia. She has been a member of the Ophthalmology Foundation (a US-based not-for-profit supporting ophthalmic education internationally) Education Committee Advisory Committee since March 2021. She was awarded Membership of the Order of Australia (AM) in 2021, for services to ophthalmology, particularly professional colleges.

Clinical A/Prof Mack's interests outside of ophthalmology are in fitness and practising yoga, reading, gardening, cooking and entertaining, opera and cricket.